

Hello. My name is Lex Everson and I am a recent college graduate. I went to Western Michigan University, and just a short time ago moved from Kalamazoo to Grand Rapids. In 2009 I volunteered on the One Kalamazoo campaign for our non-discrimination ordinance which gave the same fully inclusive protections covering sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression that the inclusive House Bill 5804 would. After learning through the Kalamazoo community's success in passing our non-discrimination ordinance that this city was a place where I could be my whole self, where my LGBTQ community was respected as equal citizens who deserve the right to work their hardest at jobs they love without being afraid of losing them because of who they are, that we won't be denied housing or evicted for reasons that have nothing to do with rent payments or credit scores- I was proud to call Kalamazoo my home. I still look on that city with love, and when I am there, I feel safer.

In the last few weeks I have been asked many times and in varying arenas about my reasons for needing an updated Elliot Larsen Civil Rights Act. This has caused me to really look at my own experiences and fears. Because this inclusive modernization looks an awful lot like extra words and hassle when you are reading it, but for the LGBTQ community- it is a promise of safety. Those words will mean that when I rent an apartment or eventually look for a home I know my gender identity or expression are not going to exclude me from the neighborhood where I want to help plant a community garden, or near where I work. It means only my credit score and savings have a say in that decision. It means that the job I hope to be promoted in, so that I can pay back my student loans, so that I can help my family, who has a street named after us in the small farming town of Coloma, that I can count on those paychecks as long as I work hard and earn my way. I described to my senator, Dave Hildenbrand, when he was considerate enough to call me back to hear what I have to say, that we need this fully inclusive bill, because right now a portion of Michigan's citizens are living in small pockets of safety, where they can be fully themselves, and so bring their full potential to their work and to our economy, but when you are traveling between cities that have protections for you, or if you live in or dare to move to a place that doesn't have those structures set up so that you can strive for the prospects and possibilities every American should be able to aim for and hope to achieve, it's like swimming against the current and hoping when you reach land- that land recognizes you as a person.

This Bill is about people. It is about the citizens of our State, and whether they are protected in working to support our beautiful Michigan. Every one of us can pinpoint our location on our hands, and I hope that when I am asked where I am safe in this mitten State, I do not have to pinpoint, I can just hold up my hand, and say- Michigan is where I am safe.